Chapter Five
Conclusion

“Woman must put herself into the
text-as into the world
and into history- by her own
movement.”

-Hélèn Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”

The study in the last three Chapters along with the Introduction has attempted to explore Subaltern-Consciousness from women perspectives. By employing Gramsci’s Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Feminist Literary Theory, the study has examined Native and Diasporic subaltern concerns of Indian women in the thirty short stories of Mahasweta Devi and Jhumpa Lahiri. After defining the meaning of subaltern in the Introductory Chapter, the subsequent three Chapters have defined each of the concepts: ‘Aggression’, ‘Identity’, and ‘Resistance’ from a feminists’ point of view to analyse the struggles of the marginalised women and to define their position in their diverse cultural contexts. It has discovered that ‘aggression’, ‘identity’, and ‘resistance’ are cultural constructs, and the women have defined them in search of their authentic individuality. As stated above in Cixous’s Essay, the study has examined how the experiences of women are put ‘into the text’ and their ‘history’ has been re-written by recording their own voices.

Devi and Lahiri, as Indian women writers have made an inclusive study of the marginalised women by scrutinising their families, communities, and societies in the Indian Native and Diasporic cultural milieu. This insight has been gained from the viewpoint of various Western and Indian Feminist Theories, particularly, from the subaltern theory of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. An application of feminists concepts have been enabled to form a hypothesis that women do have their own identity which
has been culturally suppressed by the oppressive patriarchal and epistemological powers. By recording the voice of the marginalised women as written in the short stories, the argument has continued as the underlined message in the three Chapters to evaluate their empowered status as socially responsible women. It has also located the narrative tone of the marginalised women and their transformation by means of the characterisation of women protagonists to see how they have challenged their exploitative cultural Discourses. The discovery has revealed that Indian women have emerged from their silence to articulate their inner self, despite various challenging circumstances and cultural constrains.

Indian social systems like caste, class, ethnic, and gender Discourses are examined as pivotal factors in the marginality of women. The study has examined that the women after confronting these Discourses have defined their identity as responsible social beings. Devi has recorded the unheard voices of the lower caste, tribal, peasant, brick-kiln workers, elderly women, and sex-workers by her re-making of Indian myths through a ‘feminist historiography’. It has been posited out by Spivak in *In Other Worlds* that “Devi has always been gripped by the individual in history” and there is a connection “between fact (historical event) and fiction (literary event)” (336) in all her stories. Lahiri’s Diasporic women are placed in the different cultural contexts, particularly, in America and are made known to the world through her distinctive English literary style reflected in the collection of short stories: *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*.

The study has revealed that Devi and Lahiri have documented the lives of the culturally subaltern women by allowing them to speak about their challenges and strengths in their own social contexts in order to evaluate their struggle for individuality. These archetype women characters have spoken about Indian realities
of gendered discrimination and denial of justice through their lived experiences. The short stories of Devi and Lahiri proved to be appropriate in the study because of their lucidity, precision, and concision to locate subaltern-consciousness. Having a single plot, a single theme, and a single character, the stories are centred on Bengali tribal and Diasporic women who are searching for their self. Tabish Khair in “The Knowledge of Loss, The Loss of Knowledge”, has acclaimed that Lahiri has “an Indian background who is fluent only in English” and Devi “an activist, writer and journalist who writes in Bengali and is fluent in English” (216). Either in English or in the regional languages, their short stories narrate about the ability of their women who transcend cultural constructs to define their identity as a liberating power. The women are reluctant to be submissive and docile by taking control of their own lives. A reading has located that these subaltern women have emerged from being repressed, submissive, and exploited women to become self-reliant, emancipated, confident, and assertive individuals.

The comparative study has explored fifteen short stories of Devi to locate the striking contrast and similarity between the other fifteen short stories of Lahiri. Each story is set in different communities or caste groups. It has also scrutinised Devi, has extensively used Native Indian sources of the tribal and the lower caste rural communities, their social practices, beliefs, and traditions to record their exploitative history as subaltern women. It is as Spivak points out in “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, Devi has attempted a ‘historiography of Indian subaltern to re-cover their hidden voices’. It is also referred to by Homi Bhabha as “ominous silence that utters an archaic colonial ‘Otherness’ that speaks in riddles, obliterating proper names and proper places” (176). Considering Spivak and Bhabha, it is examined that Devi’s stories have deeply penetrated into the hidden space of the
rural women to re-write their silenced history. The study has located how the voice of the subaltern is recorded in her short stories in historical narratives, oral narratives, native stories, epics, folk tales, folk songs, and personal narratives.

In Lahiri’s stories, the women have put themselves into a challenging world and re-written their history by re-calling their ‘memory’, ‘loss’, and ‘knowledge’ in their Diasporic life. Most of her women belong to the first world (America) as first or second generation women. The first generation women are traditional Indian housewives or married off to America who do not assimilate its culture. Rather they follow their home culture by wearing sarees, bangles, and vermilion on their foreheads to define their identity. The second generation women are well educated and highly professional as lawyers, doctors, and professors of universities. Lahiri also looks into the world of refugees and socially marginalised women. The stories discussed in the study have revealed how all women are alike in their experiences of marginalisation, although the nature and intensity of exploitation has varied depending upon their cultural environments. Indira Nityananda in his “Introduction” to Jhumpa Lahiri: The Tale of the Diaspora has pointed out that ‘as part of the margin, Lahiri is a force that has in the US always broadened the mainstream’. It shows that she is the important voice of India who has contributed to the richness of Indian English literature, especially, the short story.

In the second Chapter, Female Aggression, the study has defined the psychological term ‘aggression’ from the feminists’ interpretation to examine how culturally women are denied of freedom of expression and upward mobility. It has helped to evaluate how these writers of short stories have responded to the socio-cultural, economic, political, and psychological trauma of subaltern women for denying them social justice and gender equality. The feminists definitions on the
aggression of women has revealed that aggression is an inner struggle for freedom and a human cry for existence to exercise one’s responsibility. The definition has helped to examine each of the five short stories of Devi and Lahiri to evaluate the way they have defined the aggression of their woman. The potent voice of the subaltern women has revealed their aggression is an act of defiance in defining their identity by breaking traditional and cultural constrictions. It has analysed that the women are courageous individuals who have confronted their oppressors to make known their identity as autonomous beings. The research has scrutinised and discovered that the oppressive structures are male prerogatives designed by Patriarchy to distort the concept of ‘female aggression’ in order to maintain power politics and gender inequality.

The argument has supported the statement that women in the short stories of Devi and Lahiri are the representative voice of Indian women who have challenged injustice and gendered identity in order to exercise their individual freedom. Aggression as a medium of expression, the women have defied the biases in traditional practices of cultural marginalisation. To support their viewpoint, the study has applied the feminists’ concepts of Juliet Mitchell and Julia Kristeva who have posited that the aggression of women has resulted from exclusion and suppression from the linguistic order. Their viewpoint has been posited to argue that exploitation of women is caused due to various socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. The viewpoint of Mohanty and Spivak on the cultural ‘Otherness’ has been applied to examine how subaltern women have experienced repression from expressing their views. The articulated voices of the women have revealed that they were silenced and unrecognised in the Indian social system as ‘female complaint’.
The study has explored Devi’s representation of subaltern aggression through the re-making of Indian myths, folk-songs, folk-tales, allegories, ironies, women centred tribal stories, male counter narratives, and historical representations which are discovered as the typical phenomena of Indian women’s writing. The stories have re-assessed Indian history, myth, and culture to define subaltern lives of women as signs of counter narration and to protest traditional constructs of the image of Indian women. Devi’s ‘feminist historiography’ of the subaltern is to record the lower caste and tribal stories of women in their own voice as examined in “Mother of 1084”, “The Hunt”, “Douloti the Bountiful”, “The Witch”, and “Ma, From Dusk to Dawn”. The analyses of the lives and experiences of the women protagonists: Sujata, Mary Oraon, Douloti, Sombri, and Jati respectively have revealed that the women have avenged unjust social structures, the oppressive agency of the upper caste landlords and government officials by exercising their individuality. Even though, these oppressive powers have victimised them with poverty, hunger, starvation, pain, illness, illiteracy, and under-employment, yet their struggle to surpass them is consistent. It has revealed that rooted in the native culture, Devi has been able to record the authentic voice of the Indian subaltern women. She asserts it in her “Introduction” to Bitter Soil “the sole purpose of my writing is to expose many faces of the exploitating agencies” (ix). In Indian native context many powers structures have been located as the oppressive agency.

Lahiri’s stories: “A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “A Real Durwan”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “Sexy” underscore the importance of understanding the lives of Indian Diasporic women and their inner struggle to cope with cultural alienation in order to reconstruct their fragmented self within their families. The articulated voices of the women protagonists: Shoba, Mrs. Das, Boori
Ma, Lilia’s Mother, and Laxmi have revealed their inner quest for identity despite the family constraints. The study has examined that the women are perceived as the ‘Other’ in their respective cultural locations but do not succumb to it. Rather, they find different means to assert their identity. It is assessed by Suneeta Patnayak in “Jhumpa Lahiri’s Quest for Identity through Interpreter of Maladies” stating, Lahiri’s sketch of the “characters spins them through a period of turbulence when their identity seems lost in the newness of the surroundings but she makes them come to terms with reality” (162). Boori Ma finds her identity in her ostracised existence in West Bengal despite being a refugee and the other women of the stories have explored the American culture to locate their individuality. The analysis has revealed that the women have confronted their challenges by recalling their ‘home’ culture, retrospection on past ‘memory’, accepting their cultural ‘loss’, and having ‘knowledge’ about their self in their Diasporic familial relationships. The anguish and the ‘Otherness’ of Lahiri’s women is different from that in the women protagonists of Devi. If Devi examines marginality of her women which is caused by caste, Lahiri locates her women’s ethnic struggle for identity. Gendered exploitation is discovered as the common factor in the subjugation of women in their stories. The women in Devi’s stories have confronted their victim position to assert their identity in the Native experiences, whereas, Lahiri observes the complex movements of her women to counter their subalternity in their Diasporic existence. It has explored that the writers have collectively emphasised various issues as ‘displacement’, ‘ostracism’, ‘isolation’, ‘mental trauma’, and ‘loneliness’ to underscore the need to free the subaltern women. These challenges discussed by the writers are diverse and revealed the mental trauma of the Native and Diasporic women in their struggle for freedom and social acceptability.
The survey has examined how aggression expressed by the women has attempted to overcome caste, class, ethnic, and gender discrimination. It has evaluated how the writers have placed the women at various cultural, historical, and geographical locations with date, time, and chronology to argue that their subaltern stories are different in diverse cultural locations. It is explored that there is an inner struggle for the women to face ‘alienation’, ‘displacement’, and other forms of marginalisation. Thus, it is assessed that the writers have portrayed ‘anguish’, ‘pain’, ‘angst’, and emotional constraints of Native and Diasporic Indian women in a unique manner. It records how subaltern women have diverse experiences and yet have been positive in their outlook. Placing women in all circumstances, the study conducted has posited that women have rejected their subaltern position; have strived towards freedom and empowerment. The stories have supported that Native and Diasporic women are no longer subservient. Rather they are confidently searching for their identity.

In the third Chapter, **Re-defining Female Identity**, the argument is continued by defining the meaning of identity in the feminist perspective to examine the various challenges that the subaltern women are beset with to define their authentic self. The argument in the Chapter has supported the analysis of the previous Chapters, that the societal identity of women is caste, class, ethnic, and gender centred; it is constantly avenged by them. From Indian feminists and theoretical interpretations, it is shown that subaltern women are interrogating stereotyped images and valorised womanhood. The study foregrounds the need to record their experiences in their own contexts which is posited by the Essays of Elaine Showalter and Patricia Hill Collins. It has helped to examine the cultural conditioning of subaltern women. The definition of the concept of ‘female identity’ has helped to explore the ways in which Devi’s and
Lahiri’s women have expressed their need for freedom, dignity, and social mobility. Considering the viewpoints put forth by Spivak, Geetha.V and Mohanty, a progression is made to evaluate the victimisation and distortion of the identity of subaltern women.

It has been discovered that Devi and Lahiri have defined the identity of the Native and Diasporic women by exposing their intense struggles for identity in their respective cultural contexts. The analysis has examined that even though Indian women are victimised due to traditional practices and cultural biases yet their quest for identity is consistent. The five stories of Devi: “Draupadi”, “Breast-Giver”, “The Five Women”, “Dhouli”, and Shanichari” are taken to examine the ‘identity-struggles’ of the women protagonists: Dopdi, Jashoda, the Five women, Dhouli, and Shanichari. The stories have revealed the ills and evils of rape, prostitution, poverty, imprisonment, and starvation are caused due to ‘intersecting’ powers. Despite their agonising condition, the women have tried to define their identity by surmounting these obstacles and confronting the biased attitudes towards women. Each story has been evaluated to see how the male-determined roles of women have exposed them to injustice, exploitation, and to the denial of basic human rights. The study has discovered that despite their challenges, the women from the middle class Bengali Diasporic families of Lahiri and the lower caste tribals of Devi are socially more mobile in defying the upper caste/class social practices and work towards their transformation. It is delineated in the simplest thoughts and actions of the characters who take it as an opportunity to empower themselves in all circumstances. The writers as keen observers have recorded minute details of their women.

Lahiri’s “Mrs. Sen’s”, “This Blessed House”, “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”, “The Third and Final Continent”, and “Unaccustomed Earth” are examined to identify
their holistic identity in the American or Bengali cultural contexts. The quest of Lahiri’s women for self has been analysed from the different social backgrounds from which they have progressed and evolved from their marginalised status. It has been discovered that the women have defined their individuality by confronting their challenges in the alien culture or by assimilation. The analysis has evaluated the positive experiences of women who despite the challenges have discovered their solidarity and have celebrated their joyful existence for a harmonious living. The study has examined that all the stories are women-centred. Devi and Lahiri have re-interpreted the Native and Diasporic subaltern-consciousness by giving voice to the ordinary women of Bengali origin. It reflects how there is a need for the Indian women living in diverse cultures to define their selfhood.

In the fourth Chapter, Female Resistance to Stereotyping, a progression is made to evaluate the ‘resistance’ of subaltern women who have recognised their selfhood by confronting various social ‘moulds’ in diverse cultural locations. It has revealed that Indian subaltern women have taken appropriate steps to express their rebellious spirit against destructive cultural Discourses by rejecting mythical conception on their image. The definition of ‘resistance’ examined by internalising the feminist theories has helped to analyse the reasons for resistance of the subaltern women of Devi and Lahiri. The women have interrogated social injustice and gender discrimination which are caused by traditional patriarchal assumptions that have distorted the actual image of women. The study has supported the previously discussed subject matter that the identity of subaltern women is socially constructed and perpetuated by Patriarchy. It reveals how there is an interconnection that leads to parallel themes in all the Chapters. It has been supported that the image of Indian
subaltern women is stereotyped. By examining their abject position created by Patriarchy, the resistance of women has helped them to define their selfhood.

The study has critically examined Devi’s five stories “Rudali: From Fiction to Performance”, “Bayen”, “Statue”, “Bedanabala: Her Life, Her Times”, and “Giribala” and Lahiri’s five stories: “Hell-Heaven”, “Only Goodness”, “Nobody’s Business”, “Once in a Lifetime”, and “Going Ashore” to see how the subaltern women have expressed their resistance against the socially constructed images of women as ‘bonded-labourers’, ‘sex-workers’, ‘widows’, ‘witches’, ‘housewives’, and ‘sexually weaker sections’ of society. The experiences of the women protagonists: Sanichari, Chandi, Dulali, Did’ma, Kamalini, Giribala, Aparna, Sudha, Sangeeta, and Hema have been evaluated to see how they have resisted their culturally constructed moulds. The resistance has become an empowering element for them to recognise that marginalisation is caused by various destructive Discourses. The stories have portrayed social realities of women as objects of male gaze, exploitation, dislocation, and discrimination which are embedded in history, tradition, religion, and other social institutions. It has evaluated that the subaltern women have resisted oppressive social structures by defining their inner strength.

A reading of the short stories shows, Devi and Lahiri as Indian Native and Diasporic women short story writers who have re-assessed lives of Indian women from subaltern perspectives and have examined various subaltern experiences. The women located in their stories are from different Indian historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds. Their interpretation on the challenges of women has revealed different aspects of the marginalisation of Indian women of different age-groups. Although the women as subaltern victims face caste, class, ethnic, and gender discrimination, yet they display an enduring effort to surmount them. The research has
evaluated how Postcolonial Feminist Literary Theory employed in the study has helped to record the authentic identity of exploited women amidst contemporary challenges. “Decolonisation of India” (Spivak, *Imaginary Maps* xi) which Postcolonial thinkers have advocated is also located in their stories to free women from oppressive Discourses by representing their oppressive cultural history. The comparative study on the select short stories of Devi and Lahiri has revealed that despite differences, there is a relevant interconnection between their stories. Both have spoken for Bengali subaltern women and recorded their experiences in different cultural contexts.

The findings on their short stories show that the sound literary background that Devi and Lahiri inherited from their Bengali parents has helped them to represent the voice of Indian women in Native and Diasporic cultural and geographical context. The subaltern identity defined by them can be analysed in the words of Elizabeth Jackson in “Women, Culture, Identity and Social Class”, stating, “Cultural identity includes nationality, ethnicity, religion, caste, social class, regional affiliation and language” (15). Analysing these factors, the research has discovered how these factors have had an adverse effect on Indian native and diasporic women. The short stories of Devi and Lahiri have examined these factors to locate the challenges of women in discovering their potential.

The subaltern women identified in their short stories have represented the countless struggles of Bengali women who are made to live on the fringes of socio-cultural, economic, and religious locations of Indian Native and Diasporic existence. It is worth noticing that Devi and Lahiri, having an Indian Bengali origin look at Indian women from different cultural and geographical angles. The research has discovered that their common geographical origin is Bengal from where they have assessed the struggles of Bengali women living in rural or urban experiences that help
to locate the challenges of all the other Indian women. The study has also revealed how Devi has moved from rural Bengal to other villages in Orissa and Bihar and Lahiri from Calcutta to America or England to situate subaltern challenges of women in different cultural locations. The scrutiny has acclaimed that Devi as an Indian Native writer has recorded the most powerful experiences of tribal women within the communities of Palamau villages which she states in *Bitter Soil* that ‘Palamau is the Mirror of India’. It has proved that her short stories are well translated into English and regional languages of India and have won a number of national as well as international awards for her tribal activism.

Lahiri as a Diasporic Indian writer in English has delineated the challenges of middle-class Bengali women living in Indian, American, and other urban cultural locations. Her concern for the suffering women is derived from her reading and listening to stories about the ostracised women narrated by her elders. As the daughter of a librarian, her focus to read stories is inspired by her father. Lahiri’s visits to her homeland, India solidified her images of Indian women. Lahiri has looked at the Indian Partition struggle and its impact on the Diasporic lives of women. Unlike Devi’s poverty-stricken tribal and the lower caste rural women, Lahiri’s are the urban middle-class Indian Diasporic living in Bengal, England, or America. They are in search of their social, cultural, ethnic, economic, linguistic, communal, and national identity. The survey has discovered that Lahiri also has narrated human traumas by depicting the struggle of the mentally tormented, the culturally ostracised, and the socially alienated women for their authentic identity as can be seen in “The Treatment to Bibi Haldar” and “A Real Durwan”. In her simple literary language, she also has delineated complex Diasporic issues. As Indira Nityananda in “Broken Identities” comments, “there is pain and anguish, loneliness and isolation, loss of identity and
desire for assimilation” in her short stories (38). Like other Indian Diasporic women writers, she too has narrated subaltern issues through irony, metaphor, archetypal interpretation, personal narration, and allegorical narration. Considering these elements, it is proved that Devi and Lahiri as Indian women writers have parallel concerns toward women who are struggling to define their identity. It has revealed that through the powerful short stories, Devi and Lahiri have awakened the disturbed psyche of Indian women for self-recognition despite their challenges.

The research has primarily looked at Devi as an “indigenous elite” (Guha, *Subaltern Studies IV* 330) who has re-written the real experiences of the tribal and the lower caste women in their feminist narrative voice to restore human dignity to them. The stories of Lahiri are compared and contrasted with Devi’s in order to identify similar feminist traits in their writings. The study has examined how their stories have parallel subaltern themes and how they have aligned with the Postcolonial feminist argument. The advocacy in the short stories of Devi has revealed that the Patriarchal domination in both the upper caste and the lower caste communities has subjugated subaltern women resulting in them ‘double marginalisation’. The subaltern issues examined in the preceding Chapters are poverty, hunger, financial subordination, forced labour, denial of education, physical violence, discrimination, displacement, and alienation caused by caste, class, gender, and other structures of Patriarchy. Devi’s short stories support what V. Geetha opines, “Masculinity and femininity are not aspects of biology or physiology. Instead they are parts of systems of thought and action which human beings have constructed over centuries.” (51) Thus, the research has examined how the writers have deconstructed biased traditions and inhuman ideologies.
The use of stylistic devices is also analysed to examine how Devi and Lahiri have retold subaltern allegories and metaphors to record the unheard voice of women. It has examined that Devi as an Indian Native writer and Lahiri as an Indin Diasporic writer have used the local dialect and connotative Bengali expressions to evaluate the experiences of subaltern women and the impact on them in their respective cultural contexts. Devi and Lahiri have chronicled marginalised women’s stories to probe into their inner struggle to evaluate their fragmented self in a culturally marginalised situation. Both have retained many Bengali words to locate the exploitation of their women and how the women have defied their oppressive culture.

The literary nuances in their short stories are critically examined to see how their language has recorded the real experiences of the women. Devi’s simple style and idiom in the regional language has re-constructed the literary tradition of women. It is asserted by Samik Bandyopadhyay in his “Introduction” to “Five Plays” that, “she uses the style of a chronicle, often capturing the tones of oral narratives, in the ‘impure’ idiom of everyday speech, drawing on words from several sources simultaneously” (vii). The role of her translators is also examined to explore how they have retained her originality in the Bangla register. Irregular punctuation, repetitive words, emphatic sentences, and conversational modes are used to reiterate the subaltern struggle for identity. It highlights that the translators have provided proper justification to the original Bangla words by retaining un-translated words to represent Devi’s subaltern-consciousness of the tribal women. Folk rhythm retold in folk-songs and folk-tales in the stories delineates the ability of the translators to locate Devi’s knowledge of her cultural, geographical, chronological, and ideological context. It can be supported by Ramakrishnan’s statement in his “Introduction” to Indian Short Stories that “the vitality of the original text and the extent to which it
could realise its context in its structure determine the value and currency of
translations which speak to another audience in another time” (xiv). Devi’s language
has conveyed the subaltern realities in their present contexts to national and
international readers.

The short stories of Devi are representative of what Julie Stephens says about
Postcolonial writing, that it “claims to record ‘the real experiences of women’, to
understand ‘the reality of being a woman in an Indian village’, and to examine how
‘lower-class women in India really feel about being women’” (92). It signifies that
Devi as an Indian woman is able not only to understand the struggles of subaltern
women but also to interpret them in her short stories. The study has also examined
Devi’s de-construction and re-interpretation of rural/tribal myths, legends, and local
history to note its uniqueness as the subaltern women’s viewpoint. As Uma
Chakravarty in her “Through Another Lens: Men, Women and Caste” points out “Her
writings try to mitigate horrors of tyranny and outrage against Dalits. She is good at
turning problems into metaphors and events into images.” (212) Findings on the short
stories have revealed the tireless effort of Devi to restore the dignity of rural women
by means of their subject formation and exposing male domination and control.

Devi has created the concept of writing about the ‘woman’s body’ by
depicting the essence of womanhood in her mother-centred stories. By breaking the
pseudo-myths and conventional ideas about the woman’s body, Devi has asserted the
authentic identity of women. In most of her stories, Devi has portrayed the painful
experiences of her protagonists in the way they are indoctrinated to accept their
ostracism and violence by falling prey to unjust social practices and religious beliefs
that subordinate the position of women. The stories support what Toril Moi has stated
in “Feminist, Female, Feminine”, that “All ideas, including feminist ones, are in this
sense ‘contaminated’ by patriarchal ideology” (105). It means the exploitation of women is indoctrinated in all minds. Devi has written them down to show how in male dominated societies of all ages, the women have no voice of their own and need to be freed from oppressive culture. This element is critically examined in all the Chapters. The study has critically explored how the stories have re-defined the role of women that undermine the culturally inflicted divine motherhood. It is how Devi has counter-narrated the idealised role of mothers by ignoring their socially constructed sanctity. She has subverted the Patriarchal hierarchies and has reinterpreted the real experiences of women in the subaltern context.

The cause for the exploitation of Indian women as examined by Uma Chakravarti *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, is also delineated in her short stories. It is discovered by re-making Indian epics and myths in the tribal context to analyse how caste, class, and gender discriminations have caused suffering to subaltern women. Despite the challenges the women have expressed freedom by confronting the cultural biases. The lives of the protagonists of her stories are metaphors for daughter, lover, wife, and mother who have progressed and evolved in the Postcolonial feminists’ perspective. The identity of Indian womanhood located in the stories examines the causes for subaltern suffering and exploitation. The survey conducted has portrayed how Devi has relocated the image of her subaltern women amidst destructive social institutions to examine the treatment meted out to them in the cultural construct. The voice of the subaltern often expressed in their personal narration has helped them awaken to the new possibilities of life and to accept their genuine womanhood. Although Devi has depicted it as a long struggle to define their identities, they have strived to re-construct their image through resistance. Caste hierarchies examined in her short stories have reflected how the lower caste women
are devastated and depressed due to caste exploitation. Devi has asserted it in her “Introduction” to _Bitter Soil_ stating: “caste and class exploitation and the resistance of the exploited ones are rooted in India’s land-system” (vii). However, Devi has portrayed the subaltern situation from her exposure as a writer, reporter, social worker, and activist. It is in this aspect that she differs from Lahiri.

A search for identity in the American culture takes place amidst displaced location, Diasporic familial constraints, and aftermath of the Indian Partition struggle. It is termed by Samir Dayal in “Subaltern Envy” as “Hybridity, antiessentialism, performativity, and the discursive construction of identity” (264). Lahiri has awakened the Diasporic subaltern voice through multiple voices revolving around women protagonists in their cultural diversity. Most of her women are victimised due to alienation, ostracism, displacement, familial maladjustment, discrimination, exploitation, and yet their positive outlook on life makes them successful women. This study has explored how in her narrative technique, like Devi, Lahiri has also retrieved the lost voice of the marginalised women.

It is similarly observed by Tejinder Kaur in “Portrayal of Diaspora Expereinces in Jhumpa Lahiri’s _Interpreter of Maladies_”, that “it is not only in America that the Indian migrants and their children undergo these humiliating and discriminatory experiences, the diasporas meet this kind of treatment in every dominant culture and in other nation” (195). This conveys that in all cultures and societies, the oppression of women is dominant. Lahiri’s mode of historical narration and self representation in her short stories has revealed her Diasporic personal experience of the American landscape. It has helped her to speak about the positive experiences of her women protagonists. In her interview with Alfred A. Knopf, she asserts that her characters are inspired by the humanity of Thomas Hardy because
they move through time and space. The psychological terrain of Hardy’s characters is seen in Lahiri’s women characters.

By assessing these women characters it is argued that their women are confident, strong, and courageous unlike the women traditionally depicted by Indian male writers. The exploration has also revealed that both the writers have recorded stories of unconventional, rustic, marginalised, and exploited women who question oppressive cultural and Patriarchal hypocrisy that suppress Indian women. Some of their women are the voice of the tormented and the exploited who question the cultural norms of their society. It is asserted through what Tejinder Kaur states that they “also face cultural dilemma and show resistance to the discourse of power in various forms” (192). The women defy the traditional depiction of the image of women and erase their untoward experiences by being indomitable in the challenging experiences. The presentation of the daily experience of these women has revealed that their marginalisation is located in the daily struggles of their lives. This aspect of the exploitation of Indian women is discovered. It shows that like the contemporary short stories by Indian women they also have expressed resistance toward the cultural concept on the role of women.

It is discovered how Devi and Lahiri have problematised the role of subaltern women through the short stories. It can be supported with Susie Tharu and Lalita K. who have stated in their “Introduction” to Women Writing in India that Indian women writing has “provided a legitimate space for those rejected by society” (154). Devi and Lahiri have created a space for their women. Therefore, the findings of the short stories have revealed that subaltern women are no longer a part of a mythical tale but assertive women who have subverted the traditional and cultural norms on womanhood. It has also been discovered that the subaltern women portrayed by Devi
and Lahiri are neither ideal mothers nor traditional women. The research has discovered that they are strong and courageous women who question unjust social orders and cultural constructs in re-defining their identity. Thus, the study has provided a wide scope for the thematic interpretation and has recommended a reconstruction of the image of true womanhood of Indian marginalised women by discovering subaltern issues. Hence, Devi and Lahiri have left ample scope for solutions to be provided for the total liberation of subaltern women. In this aspect, their short stories remain an open-ended discussion for future research.

The subaltern reality recorded by Devi and Lahiri through many stylistic concerns could be critically surveyed by future researchers to create an egalitarian society. Through various thematic revelations the other subaltern identities of women could be discovered in their other stories which are not part of this study. Human relations are complex and it is difficult to fathom the human mind, therefore a research recommends a survey on human relationships that have caused exploitation of Diasporic women. As Mojtaba points out, identity “explores human relationships that exist in the complex network of ethnicity, nationality, identity, cultural assimilation and rejection as well as hybridity in the Bengali Community in the United States” (54). The human experience of the immigrants, the refugees, the victims of sexual violence, poverty-stricken women can be taken to explore the subaltern concerns in other short stories of Devi with a comparative study with the other regional women writers of India, like Bama, a dalit writer in Tamil, for instance. There could be further research involving around how a dalit woman, like Bama who sees her subaltern community as compared to how a non-dalit woman like Devi portrays it. The insider-outsider subaltern perspectives would be authentic to locate the subaltern struggles of women. Similarly, a comparative study of the issues raised
in Lahiri’s short stories with those of other women writers of the Indian Diaspora could be made to learn about the struggle for identity of women on non-Indian contexts. It would help to study the contributions made by Anita Desai or Gauri Deshpande regarding the position of non-resident Indian women to the themes dealt with by Lahiri. Therefore, the short stories of Devi and Lahiri are essential readings for many researchers interested in problems of language and text, cultural interpretation of women, translations studies, subaltern feminist studies, comparative analysis, and intertextuality.

The Chapters have studied the stories of Devi and Lahiri to explode the traditional myth of women as blindly accepting their down-trodden position meekly to please their men and to show them as individuals with tremendous potential to fight for and to assert their identity. The feminist theories of Spivak, Shashi Deshpande and Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan have supported that Indian women have internalised their pseudo-myths through family traditions and social practices and have expressed the need to free themselves from undue cultural practices. Similarly, the stories have recorded the overt expression of Indian women to defy these cultural moulds. This aspect provides further avenues to probe deeper into women’s power as a source of not only personal but also social upliftment.

The research has also examined how Devi and Lahiri have dwelt upon the diverse subaltern feminist themes. The emotional trauma experienced by them has made Indian women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Through empowerment, women have moved away from their narrow confines to explore their social freedom, individual dignity, and made economic mobility possible. There is a greater need to empower Indian women in India and outside of India. Devi’s and Lahiri’s short stories have established the concept of women’s rights and have
inspired individual women to fight for their rights. They have developed a heightened awareness to social, political, and legal systems, to examine atrocities and violence against their kind. Legislations have emancipated women, and Women’s Movements have sought legal support for subaltern women. There is a positive response to upholding the dignity of women by safeguarding their interests.

Devi and Lahiri’s short stories are not mere literary narratives but historical realities. They have spoken of women in connection with their social surroundings and their personal encounters. They have shown how literary writing can go hand in hand with cultural studies to enable women to fight for not only personal identity but also community co-existence. There are many disempowered women in tribal rural India and refugee-women who are victims of communalism and religious riots. So, there is a greater need to locate the unheard voices of these women and empower them by researching their stories as written by creative writers. The first-hand information about subaltern women provided by Devi and Lahiri should stimulate literary research on their stories as social documents to explore the real-time experiences of Indian rural and urban women. Such research is possible through a recovery of rural and urban literature written by un-recorded literary writers, historians, and philanthropists.

A discovery of the un-spoken and the unheard voice of Indian urban and rural women is the need of the hour. It is their voice that needs to be validated as a source of power. It plays a pivotal role in identity development and societal progress. Their voices can define, shape, and re-construct their selves and that of the community. Many un-recognised women are expressing their voice to break free from traditional barriers, to participate in public spheres both in India and abroad. Women’s writing has expressed the need for gender syncretism. It means recognition of inner powers of
women as individuals. It is liberating to consider women on par with men as co-equal entities to bring about justice and harmony in society. There is a greater need for Indian women to affirm their selfhood, and to value their contribution to society. The qualities and abilities of women are invaluable to society. When a culture celebrates the contributory powers of both men and women, then that society can build strong institutions. The family as the smallest institution can be a powerful tool in the progress of the Indian economy.

Devi and Lahiri have initiated many strategies to steer their women towards various social values. They have reinforced the social, economic, and intellectual values of women that contribute to a holistic society. They have depicted how societal conventions had traditionally restricted the contribution of women. Devi and Lahiri have given their women a voice opened, a path into public life and made possible opportunities to contribute to their families in all spheres by resisting conventional narrow gendered roles and caste biases. This aspect which is supported by Spivak is also re-asserted by Morton stating “feminism seriously considers the material histories and lives of ‘Third World’ women in its account of women’s struggles against oppression” (71). Woman power as a source of spiritual strength can re-vitalise Indian social system. Women can function as a source of wisdom and provide knowledge and information as responsible individuals. By sharing the responsibilities of their family, their communities and their society, women can complement men in building a harmonious society in Indian Postcolonial Native and Diasporic contexts.
Works Cited


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